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Central Intelligence Agency

Production Staff
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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE
21 April 1988Nicaragua: Assessment of Insurgent and Regime Capabilities
in First Quarter 1988

Summary



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The level of combat and the sophistication of rebel attacks have declined over the past three months, largely reflecting resupply problems, waning external support, and uncertainties about the outcome of cease-fire negotiations. Although the Sandinista offensive against rebel facilities at San Andres de Bocay in March demonstrated some improvements in the capabilities of the Nicaraguan military, Managua faced rising discontent at home over its poor handling of the economy.

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The Insurgents

Although the rebels continued to operate in their traditional areas, their military initiative declined as they withdrew towards the Honduran border for resupply in mid-February, [redacted] Overall, the average number of clashes dropped significantly, by roughly 50 percent per week after 15 February. Moreover, the fighting was largely concentrated in north-central Nicaragua, with proportionately fewer clashes in central Nicaragua. (see map) [redacted]

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This typescript was prepared by [redacted] Nicaragua Branch, Middle America-Caribbean Division, Office of African and Latin American Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Middle America-Caribbean Division, ALA, [redacted]

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The complexity and size of rebel operations also declined, especially compared with their sophisticated attacks on the Rama Road and Las Minas area in the last three months of 1987. Between February and March, for example, the rebels conducted only two major attacks combining several units--against a Sandinista supply depot at Zanzibar in south-central Nicaragua and against a telecommunications site at La Laguna near Esteli.

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The Sandinista offensive against San Andres de Bocay also highlighted deficiencies in rebel command and control procedures. Insurgent military commander Enrique Bermudez said that during the Sandinista incursion he had difficulty obtaining information from his troops because of command and control problems. He also noted that his forces offered little, if any, resistance to Sandinista advances in the first few days of the fighting as they fell back in a series of defensive positions,

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Bermudez also has stated that only 480 troops--about a third of the total available at the Bocay base complex--actually participated in the defense of San Andres de Bocay,

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Chronic rebel resupply problems had worsened as early as January. Resupply missions were suspended after the Sandinistas shot down a DC-6 on 23 January until 6 February. There were no missions after 25 February, and several rebel units were suffering from serious supply shortages by the time US aid ended on 29 February.

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Honduran restrictions on rebel activity also have impeded insurgent resupply and logistics capabilities. There apparently was no reply from Tegucigalpa to a rebel request in early March to move their headquarters from San Andres de Bocay--inaccessible except by air--to Yamales, where overland resupply is possible. During the Sandinista offensive on San Andres de Bocay, Honduras agreed to release additional supplies on the condition that the insurgents return to Nicaragua,

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In our judgment, the chronic resupply problems lowered insurgent morale. troop morale suffered in the wake of the negative Congressional vote on continued funding in early February. Although a surge in aerial resupply bolstered morale somewhat, the continuing uncertainty was affecting morale in some regional commands,

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The decline in rebel activity this quarter probably impeded the insurgents' ability to maintain rural support at previous levels, in our view. Reporting from the Embassy in January, for

example, indicated the rebels had appropriated food and animals in Jinotega for their own use. Such action, probably the result of a lack of funds, was undermining rebel support. [REDACTED]

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The Government

Greater Sandinista aggressiveness was evident in the military preparations culminating in the attack on San Andres de Bocay. Government forces showed more initiative in the weeks prior to the offensive, sustaining pressure in the lower Bocay Valley to disrupt resupply and drive the rebels north across the border. The incursion put the insurgents on the defensive, and, with government forces remaining in the Bocay area, the Sandinistas maintained the upper hand through the end of the quarter. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the offensive demonstrated major improvements in Sandinista command and control. The government created a forward command post at Bonanza to control ground operations and coordinate air support and surveillance, according to US officials. The Sandinistas also employed unprecedented numbers of transport helicopters to airlift their infantry into the forward edge of the battle area--rather than walking them in as in previous incursions--and to conduct effective aerial resupply, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The Sandinistas generally demonstrated an ability to keep most of their forces resupplied during the operation. [REDACTED]

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On the political front, the Sandinistas faced new outbursts of discontent--both organized and spontaneous--over the deteriorating economic situation. In early February, about 5,000 people marched in Managua to protest food shortages, according to the US Embassy. The government announced monetary reforms in mid-February that included the introduction of a new currency. Wage reforms provoked strikes in March, and labor unions--including some Sandinista-affiliated locals--formed a commission to coordinate future walkouts. Also in March, merchants in Managua and Jinotega closed their doors to protest the government's aggressive enforcement of new price restrictions. [REDACTED]

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Annex: Methodology

The system of indicators used in this typescript is not intended to give a net assessment of the war, nor to predict who will win and how soon. Instead, it defines general levels of weakness and strength in areas identified as historically significant in times of successful insurgencies and stable Marxist-Leninist regimes. The indicators illustrate trends over time, but they should not be viewed in isolation because growing strength on one side may be offset by corresponding strength on the other side.

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The system consists of two matrices: The first arrays nine military and eight political indicators for assessing the capabilities of the anti-Sandinista insurgents; the second provides ten military and nine political indicators for assessing Sandinista capabilities. In filling out the matrices, our analysts refer to a User's Guide that includes:

- A list of key measures for each indicator to assess insurgent or regime performance.
- A description of what level of activity one would expect to find if insurgent or regime performance against that indicator were deficient, weak, moderate, substantial, or strong. In essence, we have established a scale for each indicator and then defined levels of activity at various points along that scale.

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The factors and rankings reflect the present situation in Nicaragua but are based on analysis of a variety of historical insurgencies. In each case, the end points describing deficient or strong capabilities were set first, and then levels of weak, moderate, and substantial performance were defined at mid points along this spectrum. The system was designed by a panel of political, military, and economic analysts who follow Nicaragua on a daily basis.

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INSURGENCY INDICATOR #2

Geographic Extent of Operations

DESCRIPTION: Ability to operate in the various regions of Nicaragua.

DEFINITION
OF LEVELS:

DEFICIENT: Rebels generally operate in proximity to borders.

WEAK: Operate only in a few isolated areas at a time. Other fronts are sporadic or dormant more than 90 percent of the time. Not able to enter urban or heavily defended areas.

MODERATE: Can operate in most rural regions simultaneously most of the time. Operations in urban or heavily defended areas are rare.

SUBSTANTIAL: Can operate in all rural areas most of the time with occasional forays into urban and heavily defended areas.

STRONG: Operate in all five regions of Nicaragua simultaneously. Operate in urban as well as rural areas.

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☐ Deficient ☒ Substantial
☒ Weak ☒ Strong
☒ Moderate

High } Level of confidence
Med } in judgment
Low }

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The Sandinista Regime

Key Indicators

Legend ○ Deficient ● Substantial
 ○ Weak ● Strong
 ○ Moderate

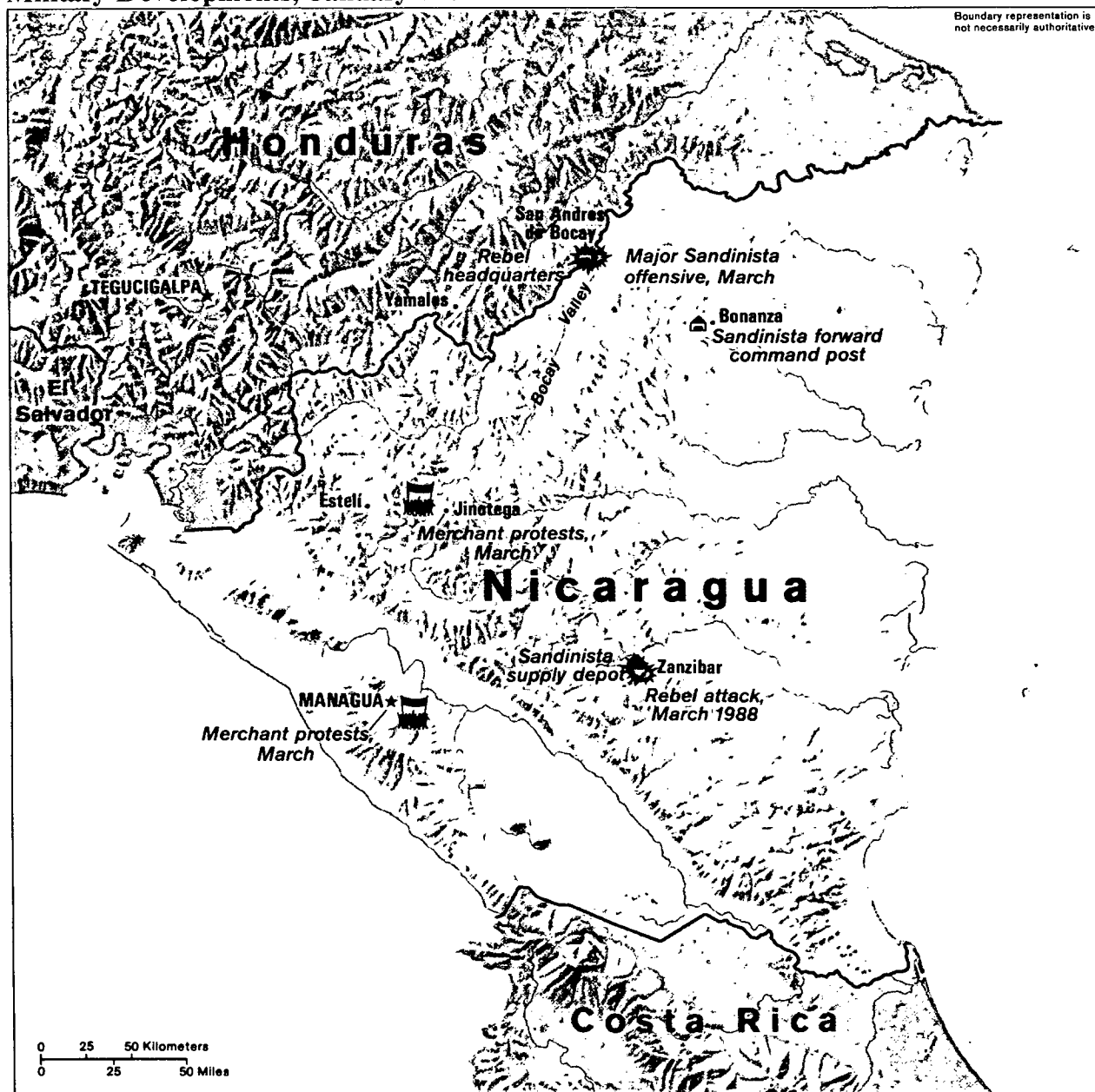
$\left. \begin{array}{c} \text{High} \\ \text{Med} \\ \text{Low} \end{array} \right\} \text{Level of confidence in judgment}$

Military Capabilities		1986 Quarters			1987 Quarters			1988 Quarters		
		II	III	IV	I	II	III	IV	I	
1	Command and control	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med
2	Strategy and tactics	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med
3	Intelligence and security	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High
4	Military aggressiveness	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med
5	Mobility/Presence in countryside	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High
6	Combat effectiveness	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High
7	Recruitment and retention	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med
8	Availability of weapons and equipment	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High
9	Logistic support	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High
10	Ability to assimilate equipment and operate without foreign advisors	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med
Political Capabilities										
11	Directorate unity and cohesion	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med
12	Civilian/military relations	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med
13	Internal security	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High
14	Political institutions	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Low
15	Ability to mobilize mass support	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med
16	Control of political opposition	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High
17	Ability to defuse religious/ethnic discontent	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med
18	Ability to deflect dissatisfaction with economic performance	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	High
19	Foreign political/diplomatic support	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Med

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Military Developments, January-March 1988



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SUBJECT: Nicaragua: Assessment of Insurgent and Regime Capabilities
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- White House Situation Room, The White House
- Mr. Donald Gregg, Assistant to the Vice President for National Security Affairs, Old EOB, Room 298
- LTG Colin L. Powell, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, NSC
- Amb. Jose Sorzano, NSC, Old EOB, Room 391
- Mr. Barry Kelly, NSC, Old EOB, Room 300
- The Honorable Elliott Abrams, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Room 6263, State
- The Honorable Michael H. Armacost, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Room 7240, State
- The Honorable William G. Walker, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Central America, Room 6263, State
- Mr. Jack Leonard, Director, Nicaraguan Coordination Office/ARA, Room 4908, State
- Mr. Luigi Einaudi, Director, Office of Policy Planning Coordination/ARA, Room 6913A, State
- Amb. Morton I. Abramowitz, Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research, Room 6531, State
- Mr. Robert Fouche, Director, Office of Analysis for Inter-American Republics/INR, Room 7358, State
- Mr. David Smith, Chief, Middle America-Caribbean Division/INR Room 7637, State
- The Honorable Fred C. Ikle, USP/D, DOD, Room 4D810, Pentagon
- Mr. Robert Pastorino, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Security Affairs, DOD, Room 4C800, Pentagon
- LTG Dale A. Vesser, JCS, Room 2E996, Pentagon
- RADM Anthony A. Less, JCS, Room 2E976, Pentagon
- VADM Jonathan T. Howe, USN, Assistant to the Chairman, JCS, Room 2E872, Pentagon
- CAJIT (Ken Rosen) Room 1D917, Pentagon
- LTG Leonard H. Perroots, USAF, D/DIA, Room 3E258, Pentagon
- Col. John Cash, USA, DIO/DIA, Room 2A520, Pentagon
- LTG Sidney T. Weinstein, USA, Assistant Chief of Staff, Room 2E466, Pentagon
- Maj. Robert Scott, USA, JSI4B, Room MB932, Pentagon
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[REDACTED] 25X1

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[REDACTED] 25X1

- Mr. Randall M. Fort, Office of Intelligence Support, Room 4324 Treasury

[REDACTED] 25X1

[REDACTED] 25X1

- SSCI (Attn: [REDACTED]) Room 7B02

- HPSCI (Attn: [REDACTED]) Room 7B02

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